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ABSTRACT

The use of creative drama in the classroom is a student-focused process where experiential learning can be fostered and developed within any given curriculum. It can help students to develop divergent thinking skills, inventive creativity, and cognitive thinking skills, and it can stimulate the development of oral and written communication skills. Used in a social context, creative drama can show the student the way to be empathetic to the needs of others and consequently the student will be better able to form a value judgment. Fostering intuition, creative drama helps the student to relegate inner strengths of "knowing" into concrete action. Creative drama is a holistic approach to academic learning. Non-threatening classroom exercises can provide a genuine feeling of surprise and fun in the classroom and help students to become aware of the utilization of their imagination. In one exercise, students read parts of Emerson's essay "Fate"; they dressed in black and, turning off all the lights, read the essay aloud with flashlights. Afterwards, students talked about how fate influences lives. It is important, if such activities are to be successful, that the instructor instill students with a sense of trust. Students must not be forced to participate--they should be asked. In an exercise promoting trust, a student is blindfolded and another student leads him around the room while a poem or passage of prose is read. (Contains 14 references.) (TB)

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Creative Drama in the Classroom

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Much emphasis today is being placed on educational goals that foster creativity, cognitive learning, divergent thinking skills, and oral and written communication skills. For years the majority of classroom atmospheres were developed around the teacher in the front of the classroom supplying knowledge to the students. The teacher would ask the questions, and the student would answer them. This type of teacher focused classroom gives little opportunity for students to develop creativity and inventiveness. Student focused learning can provide the student with the mechanism for learning and can place the responsibility for much of student acquired knowledge on a personal level. Used as a classroom

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methodology, creative drama can provide a student focused base for learning. The use of creative drama in the classroom is a student focused process where experiential learning can be fostered and developed within any given curriculum. Many of the above goals mentioned were at one time fostered in situations other than the classroom. Therefore, the type of abstract sequential teaching methods that are still being used in the classroom were adequate for many students (Gregorc, 1985).

Not too many years ago the majority of students walked to school. Many lessons were taught, as well as learned, by children walking to school. Students became aware of their environment, and this helped to establish a sensory perception to their surroundings. There was exposure to plants and animals as well as social compatibility to be learned. Walking to school in the morning, and home in the evening, brought on a community spirit with the students. Problems arose, and problems were solved by the communilty of students. The development of this microcosm helped the child to

communicate, think, and cope with the macrocosm of the larger world. It was a small world, but as the child grew, more knowledge of the world and its surroundings were taken into the child's life as experiential learning.

Consider the fact that our schools are much larger and therefore elicit a less personal atmosphere for fostering relationships with other students, and also with teachers. Many children, if not most, ride the bus to school. There is a loss of experiential learning when children are no longer able to form a community bonding where they can learn to function and develop skills such as decision and perception in their own capacity. Visual acuity and sensory perception of the world around the student was at one time easily learned on the playground, at home, and at school. Today, many children do not have much access for unstructured play. Much of their play consists of structured activities where there is little room for the development of creativity and inventiveness. Many stay indoors and are occupied with television for their companion and play time.

The use of creative drama in the classroom is a powerful tool to help combat the inertia that has crept into our classrooms. Creative drama in the classroom can help to develop divergent thinking skills, inventive creativity, cognitive thinking skills, and stimulate the development of oral and written communication skills.

Rollo May discusses creative courage as, "the discovering of new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society can be built" (May,1975). The ability to be creative is present within every individual. The use of creative drama helps the student to process that internal ability into an external form.

"Education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned with the individuality of individuals, with the uniqueness of each human essence" (Way, 1973). The use of drama within the classroom endeavors to develop the individual student. Many times drama is thought of as another class, such as theatre. Drama is not theatre; drama is a precursor for theatre. In order to have a justifiable portrayal

of theatre character, drama is often studied. I have often used creative drama techniques to awake the creative forces in acting students. But aside from theatre production, creative drama is its own entity. Its use as a teaching strategy incorporates the individual student in a community atmosphere where he/she can share individual thoughts and actions. Fostering intuition, creative drama helps the student to relegate inner strengths of "knowing" into concrete action. It permits the emotional strengths of the individual to combine with external facts in order to produce a valid outcome. Used in a social context, creative drama can show the student the way to be empathic to the needs of others and consequently the student will be better able to form a value judgment.

The idea of imagination and creativity being only placed with the arts has long been an educational practice. The National Endowment for Arts Education in a recent study proposes that art should transcend into all fields of study. It should not be considered a separate entity. Just as every person is born with imagination, drama exists in every facet

of our lives. It is an internal art form that can be used in an operational mode when divergent thinking skills are needed in problem solving. As was stated above, the use of the imagination creates inventiveness. "In terms of education, it is vital that each human being is helped both to develop his or her own imagination and to feel confidence in it" (Toward Civilization, 1973).

Creative drama is a very holistic approach to academic learning. It creates trust among students because of the basic need for understanding, not only from the group, but from the individuals within the group. There is a definite relationship that is created because of the extensiveness of all of the group participation. Thus, the students are taught to function individually within a group situation. The sharing experience is also an important point to remember when the use of creative drama is used as an educational tool. All of the work that is done by the individual is shared by the group. Learning this way produces understanding and communication skills.

The oral development of words and thought patterns is

another added benefit of using creative drama. The student is introduced into a world of oral participation. There is no expectation to perform as in theatre. Students are encouraged to listen to, and share ideas. The threat of defeat is not there to promote undue risk. Eased into creative drama activities, the student can grow and learn how to cope with problems that arise in a controlled and non-risk taking atmosphere. It is at this level that confidence can become instilled in the student. Multiple perspectives can be taught. An example of this would be using chamber theatre in order to evaluate a story. The narrator not only is telling the story, but parts of the story are read and acted out using improvisation. The group is working together as a unit and each person is acting individually, yet, working toward one common goal. Each part of the group hinges on the other promoting trust and acceptance. This idea of group participation lends itself particularly well with the practice of cooperative learning. Creative drama activities can be implemented very easily within the cooperative learning structure by involving the students in a task oriented project

associated with content material. I often tell students, "If you can see it-- read it-- think it-- write it-- be it-- it's yours." Creative drama can be Creative play resulting in inventiveness.

Years ago I met and elderly gentleman who told me that he never worked a day in his life. When I asked him what he did, he told me that he spent his life playing. I was astonished. He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and told me he was an airplane pilot, and that he loved his work so much that he never considered it a job, just play. I have always remembered that incident. I reflect on it when sometimes I hear criticism of the arts supplying too much "fun" for students to engage in. Why then do so many of us, educators included, believe that if we are having a good time doing something, even something important, it ceases to lose its beneficial meaning or value-- or it is not considered to be constructive work, therefore, it is wasted--it is play. Johan Huizinga (1950) states in Homo Ludens, in nature and significance of play, that one can deny nearly all other abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness,

mind, and God, but one cannot deny the seriousness of play. By acknowledging play, one acknowledges the mind. He further states:

To our way of thinking, play is the direct opposite of seriousness...We can say: play is non-seriousness. But apart from the fact that this proposition tells us nothing about the positive qualities of play, it is extraordinarily easy to refute. As soon as we proceed from 'play is non-seriousness' to 'play is not serious,' the contrast leaves us in the lurch --for some play can be very serious indeed. (Huizinga,1950)

Sensory Learning or sensory awareness exercises--a creative pre-writing activity

Objective: The student will react to various forms of stimuli.

The following are in place pantomimes used to stimulate imagination and to provide motivation and practice.

Listening recall

1. Think about a favorite piece of music that you know. recall the song and attempt to play the tune on any instrument that you prefer.

2. Think about a favorite piece of music that you know. Lead an orchestra, be the conductor, and perform the music.

3. You are sitting at the computer or typewriter. See the screen or the paper before you. Begin to type. Hear the sounds of the keys as you create a written assignment.

Tactile recall

1. Touch the top of your left hand. Imagine that there is something sticky on the top of your knuckles. Try to remove it.

2. Look in an imaginary mirror at your face. You notice that there is a smudge on your nose. Try to remove this smudge, but do it carefully because your nose is sunburned.

3. You are thirsty, but you have no glass or cup from which to drink. In front of you is a stream of clear and clean spring water. Get a drink.

Olfactory recall

1. Think of a very pleasant smell that you remember from long ago. Use a movement to show what it is.

2. You have just picked a bouquet of roses--smell them and deeply inhale their fragrance.

3. You are in the fish market on a hot summer day. Respond to the smell of the fish just as you open the door to the market.

Taste recall

1. You have just come into your house and someone has just baked an apple pie--react.

2. You have just put a dill pickle into your mouth--react.

3. Eat your favorite dessert. We will guess what it is.

Outcome:

Besides providing a genuine feeling of surprise and fun in the classroom this non-threatening exercise helps the student to become aware of the utilization of his/her imagination. The mind over matter properties of this exercise can help the student to realize just how much imagination can surface into the real world. This can be a marvelous pre-writing exercise using cause and effect.

Creative drama promotes cognitive learning.

By using the physical aspects of the body and oral interpretation, the student can create a climate to experiment. Divergent thinking skills begin to form, and since the student is in a non-threatening atmosphere he can begin to experiment with divergent thinking patterns on the subject. When the climate of experiment is created, and the student feels comfortable taking risks, creativity can begin to work. The dream can become the reality.

The use of long term memory is greatly enhanced by the use of creative drama. Because the student is acting out and carrying on problem solving techniques, reinforcement of acquired knowledge that is being learned is taking place.

Reflective Learning with the use of Reader's Theatre and Chamber Theatre in the English Classroom

Objective: The student will read and identify aspects

of Emerson's essays.

I have used readers theatre and chamber theatre in literature classes. With the use of readers theatre and chamber theatre the story or piece of literature is read from the script. The student's text is the script. In both mediums there is a narrator. In readers theatre the narrator does not take an active part in the drama. The narrator stays away from were the rest of the cast will be portraying the story as it is read. Each member of the cast may read a part; deletions can be made from the text and additions are permitted. Sometimes the narrator will read the piece and the rest of the players will mime a scene. Readers theatre uses no costumes as opposed to chamber theatre.

Several readings were done by Ralph Waldo Emerson. One in particular was an excerpt from the essay Fate . The group of players who elected to present Fate decided to do chamber theatre. The classroom was set in an arena fashion. The players chose the back wall to do the reading. Each of five students dressed in black and brought in flashlights. They

formed a pyramid and read Fate in the dark using only their flashlights for light.

Outcome:

After the reading we had a debriefing. Application was made as to how fate influences our lives and the lives of others. Questions were asked about how we can create our own fate. Some students thought that hope played an important part in people's view of fate. Ideas were freely flowing. I think Emerson would have approved.

The creative drama teacher must structure activities to instill trust.

The student must first feel basic trust from the instructor. This is created by the teacher becoming understanding and committed to each student. The teacher becomes a mentor for the students, guiding them through activities and creating a non-threatening atmosphere for the class. Creative drama tasks should not be forced upon the student. The student must be asked to participate in the activities. If a student refuses, patience must be exerted by

the teacher. The student must be drawn into the group by using tenuous efforts to gain involvement. Such phrases as, "how do you feel," should be asked by the teacher. "Show us if you can, and share with us if you would like to," are also some of the possible ways a teacher can ask for the student to present a point. By doing this technique, the student is not put upon, but is asked to share, thus, increasing student feelings of personal worth. The student is being asked to contribute, and his/her knowledge is being synthesized. The creative drama teacher never acknowledges that someone has performed well. The word, "good", as an acknowledgment after a student's reply, is rarely used. What everyone in the class says has merit. It is the substance of what is being contributed that is of value, not the manner in which it is being done. Creative drama is non-judgemental.

The voice of the teacher is very important for the creative drama teacher. It is very important that the voice be used as a instrument with which the instructor can control the class by the use of an inflection. If the voice is harsh, the

students will feel the stress of the vibrations in the exercise. The voice should promote confidence and trust within the student for the instructor. If the class needs to move forward at a faster pace, the teacher's voice can help create the pace by speeding up the voice commands. If the pace needs to be a comforting one, the teacher need only to create a softer and more reassuring voice. The students will soon recognize the voice quality as part of the creative drama practice.

Social Learning Using the Blind Walk Exercise

Objective: generate and develop trust

This exercise must be done in complete silence. The only voice that is to be heard is the teacher's. This exercise is done in small groups of not more than five. The players stand beside each other, one with a blindfold in hand. It is important that the teacher ask the players to close their eyes and relaxation breathing exercises can be done. If the class has been exposed to centering this can be also effective as a relaxation tool. A passage of prose or a poem evoking imagery should be read as the blindfold is placed over the eyes of one player. The blind

walk begins as each player takes a turn in leading the blindfolded person on the walk. The idea that is developed is one of total trust on the part of the blindfolded person; and complete caring on the part of the people who are leading the blindfolded player.

Outcome:

Before the debriefing, it highly suggested that the class write their experiences down as poetry. They might be permitted to write free verse to describe the feelings and sensations they felt on the blind walk. This is an extraordinary exercise in sensory perception. I have not always participated in these exercises with my students as a player, but in this particular one I did. The experience I had was very gratifying. The caring and security I sensed gave me an added feeling of hope and pride in my students.

Drama is a part of everyone's life. It is a vital part of our existence. We play out scenarios in our every day lives. To use creative drama as a threshold where students can totally identify the self with the reality of knowing, I believe, is an

definite enhancement to learning. How else can education be approached in such a humanistic way by involving the whole person? Creative drama can open many avenues of pleasurable learning for students, but the teacher must remember that the aim of creative drama, "is to build on pupils' past experience and give them a deeper knowledge not just of themselves but of what it is to be human, as well as an understanding of the society they live in and its past, present and future" (Heathcote,1984).

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